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ABSTRACT

A discussion of language policy in Australia chronicles the history and context of policy formation and looks at the role of the National Languages and Literacy Institute. The paper first examines the phases and processes of both explicit and unofficial policy-making on language issues in Australia, highlighting the role that language professionals (teachers, linguists, and applied linguistics) have played in the evolution of national language policies. Then the National Languages and Literacy Institute and its main areas of work are described. The Institute is a decentralized policy research organization established in 1990, owned by the States and Territories of Australia and the federal government, with partnership involvement of the universities, immigration and cultural agencies, business and labor, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. The discussion also traces some of the tensions and conflicts inherent in coordinating and conducting research intended for solving educational and social problems related to language. Finally, some of the directions and debates in contemporary language policy are analyzed, and comments are made on the role that explicit linguistic knowledge and research could play in resolving problems and implementing policy successfully. (MSE)

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THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND LITERACY INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA: A DISTINCTIVE MODEL for LANGUAGE PLANNING AND FOR A LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION PLANNING AGENCY?

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Director

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This is undoubtedly the most exciting and productive period in the history of applied linguistics and national language, and language-in-education planning, in Australia.

1.2 The negative and hostile pattern of past intervention by public authorities to modify the language use and language behaviour choices and preferences of the population; (not to mention the accompanying popular processes of stigmatisation, denigration and outright oppression of certain groups and their languages) have, in recent decades, given way to systematic and serious attempts to cultivate and value the great linguistic diversity of Australia.

1.3 Both the introduced and the indigenous languages of Australia have received concrete support and public affirmation in successive state and federal policies. Institutional structures designed to translate this linguistic demographic pluralism into intellectual skills and nationally beneficial competencies have been set up. The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia is the key official body among these.

1.4 In this paper, I shall set out the broad context in which Australia is developing its position on languages and the role of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia.

1.5 In the next section I describe the macro scene; the phases and the processes of both explicit and covert policy making on language issues in Australia. I will highlight the role that language professionals (teachers, linguists and applied linguistics) have played in the evolution of national language policies.

1.6 In the subsequent part of the paper I describe the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia and set out its main areas of work.

1.7 In the following section I trace some of the tensions and conflicts inherent in coordinating and conducting research which is intended to be applied to solving educational and social problems of language.

1.8 Finally I analyse some of the broad directions and debates in contemporary language policy and comment on the role that explicit linguistic knowledge and research could play in resolving problems and implementing successfully, desired policy.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN AUSTRALIA

2.1 For most of Australian's post-British colonisation history the implicit goal of policy was for universal English monolingualism based on southern British norms; with elite foreign language teaching primarily intended as a form of tertiary access selection.

2.2 Such a goal, though never enunciated as clearly, was the inexorable outcome of a complex of public decisions and private attitudes. The primary means for achieving this outcome were the following:

1. the outright hostility shown by the European settlers towards the speakers of the more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia. The extreme personal and cultural dislocation, including forcible family separations, whilst not commonly directed at linguistic genocide did often have this effect depleting significantly the number of Australian languages by almost 100.

2. the persistent stigmatisation of Australian varieties of English and the English and the modelling of southern British norms in broadcasting and in education.

3. the neglect and frequent denigration of immigrant languages other than English.

4. the marginalisation and trivialisation of foreign language education. (Clyne 1991a; Lo Bianco 1990; Ozolins 1993; Fesl 1987)

2.3 The almost complete reversal of these negative goals culminating in explicit, pluralistic language policies coincides with; and indeed is the direct corollary of, new images and theories of national cohesion and character. The older pattern which, despite the demographic diversity that has always been a feature of the population desired a homogenous and predictable cultural and ethnic reality. The collapse of narrow definitions of the national culture have accelerated the abandonment of its linguistic counterpart; monolingualism.

2.4 During the 19th century generally tolerant attitudes to languages other than English had been common in all the British colonies that in 1901 federated to form the Commonwealth of Australia. With the exception of Aboriginal languages public authorities did not actively, and often not even implicitly, discourage the use and promotion of languages other than English. It was only with the commencement of institutionalised formal education in the 1870's that English came to be allocated a competitive and key role. Chinese, French, German, Scots, and Irish Gaelic and Italian had been widely spoken and taught in many areas.

2.5 Immediately after federation generally tolerant attitudes and accepting policies prevailed (Clyne 1991). With the enactment of racist anti-Asian immigration laws and vicarious (and eventually close-up) hostility to the Kaiser's Germany led directly to the first explicit and negative language policies. Legislation forcibly

converting German medium schools to English-only, or closing such schools down altogether, was passed in several states. Renaming of buildings, towns and districts was imposed and sometimes organised oppression of Aboriginal languages was also practiced. After the 1914-18 war such policies became very muted but the essentially monolingualist orientation persisted until the population mix (dramatically changed by the Post 1945 Migration-Program) caused the abandonment of restrictive cultural and linguistic policies. It is an irony beyond the scope of this paper to analyse that the essentially ethno-centric purposes of the recruitment of people under the Migration Program led directly to the total transformation of the governing ideology of homogeneity and restrictive intervention in the linguistic and cultural pattern of social life.

2.6 In recent decades progressively more positive orientations towards pluralistic cultural futures for Australia (and multi-lingualism as a key and permanent part of this) have been a feature of public policy. To a significant degree it is the uncontested position of English that has helped this to come about. Despite having no de jure status English so dominates all domains of power that it is the de facto national language.

2.7 Ruiz (1988) has argued that underlying language policies there is a discernible pattern of thinking which he calls an orientation. He identifies three: Language as a Problem; Language as a Right and Language as Resource. These describe well the general though not so neatly compartmentalised, phases of policy making since the mid-1960's. These policies, however, have usually been a subset of policy positions on the integration of immigrants. Only since the early 1980's has language policy making become an activity in its own right.

2.8 As far as minority languages are concerned policies have gravitated between two opposite poles of emphasis: occasionally stressing the rights and opportunities of minority groups and the role of language maintenance in this goal and at other times giving primacy to the broader national benefit deriving from pluralism. The first of these, aims to contribute to overcoming ethnically-based inequalities, in particular the unequal segmentation of the labour market; the latter seeks some neutralising of the political effects of a rights-equality focus.

2.9 Despite a significant measure of expedient politicians' rhetorical affirmation of diversity (rich mosaics of culture interacting; and all that) and despite a strongly contesting school of thought that holds that pluralist notions of society are invariably used by dominant groups to entrench inequalities, or to confound the true economic bases of inequality; despite these, a great deal of the development of policy since the late 1960's has been genuinely progressive and pluralistic.

2.10 Key steps laying the foundations for overall policies today have been the following:

- The success of the 1967 referendum transferring responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs from State and Territory governments to the Commonwealth or federal government. This lay the basis for Aboriginal language maintenance programs.

- The passing of the 1971 Immigration (Education) Act. In this legislation the Commonwealth explicitly recognised its primary responsibility for the settlement and language education of newly arrived immigrants.

- The concessions granted in two States in the mid 1970's for bilingual, community language maintenance and multi-cultural programs.

- The initiation by the federal authorities of Aboriginal bilingual programs in the early 1970's in areas of Commonwealth jurisdiction.

- The accession by Britain to the European Community which forced Australian exporting industries to re-assess their traditional markets and conclude that the future lay in the potential (now booming) markets of Asia; this economic stimulus leading to a wider self definition for Australia.

- The neglect and decline of second language teaching which mobilised language professionals to give legitimacy to the demands by ethnic and Aboriginal groups for a national language policy.

- The co-alition of interests between ethnic, Aboriginal and other groups that created a coherent and unified constituency for languages that was able to generate a sophisticated set of demands on government. This was a crucially important "bottom-up" phase in developing our National Policy on Languages because previously disunited lobbies joined forces and characterised their claims as an integral part of the national interest at a time when government and popular attention was focussing on a new international role for Australia.

2.11 The culmination of these developments was the adoption and full funding of the 1987 National Policy on Languages; Australia's first explicit language policy (Lo Bianco 1987). The National Policy on Languages was also adopted as a model by most States resulting in a set of complementary statements of purpose and implementation plans across all areas of language focus: English; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages; Languages Other Than English; Language services

2.12 In 1991 the federal government revised the National Policy on Languages in a new statement known as the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (Dawkins 1991). Despite slightly de-emphasising the pluralistic character of the NPL and attempting to make the issue of English literacy an all encompassing concept to subsume ESL Australia's National Policy on Languages remains largely intact. There is extensive public support demonstrated in the responses to the proposed early revisions, and now, continued extensive funding for languages. This extends well beyond school education or any educational setting including legal and medical interpreting/translating services, multi-lingual public and private broadcasting, bilingual aged care services; and research funding via the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia.

2.13 As far as research is concerned Clyne (1991) has calculated that for 1986, the year prior to the adoption of the National Policy on Languages applied linguistics was able to garner only about $350,000 from the general research funding of the Australian Research Council. Today this figure seems as paltry as it indeed is; in addition to ARC funding there is funding for National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research; Key Centres for Research on Latin America, Melanesian and the South Pacific Linguistics, the Middle East, the Pacific, North Asia; South Asia, Korean Studies, Aboriginal Linguistics via the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. In addition Asian studies and literacy have been made cross-cutting priority criteria for all general research funding designated by the Australian Research Council.

2.14 I now turn to describe the National Languages and Literacy Institute, the main areas of its work; mandate and structure.

3.0 THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND LITERACY INSTITUTE of AUSTRALIA

3.1 The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia is a decentralised policy research organisation set up under the National Policy on Languages. It commenced operations in June 1990. It is owned by the States and Territories of Australia and the federal government with partnership involvement of the Universities, Immigration/Multiculturalism, business and labour as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation.

3.2 At the end of 1992 the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia had grown from extremely modest beginnings to comprise the following constituent parts:

- A directorate, based in Canberra, focussing on research initiation and coordination of applied linguistics in its area of mandate across Australia. A main focus of the directorate is to advocate the policy implications of research in language education in the belief that the connection between research and practice and policy has been inadequate and loose in the past.

- Nine Research and Development Centres located in ten Universities across Australia. Each Research Centre addresses a complementary but distinctive area of applied linguistics. An overall research agenda is evolved collectively, distributed for debate and feedback, implemented and then the results disseminated to teachers and policy makers. Research areas involve: language testing and language testing and curriculum; language and society; psycholinguistics of second language acquisition; language and technology; Australian sign language and language disabilities; workplace communication and culture; Australian English and style; and pedagogy. Additional research centres specialising in Aboriginal language maintenance and in interpreting/translating are planned.

- two national networks of participating research centres in child English as a second language and in adult literacy. These involve every State and Territory; coordinated by the directorate of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia; in a rolling triennial plan of literacy/ESL research. The work program is negotiated with practitioners in the fields. The primary initial goal is to map and critique the totality of ESL and literacy research across Australia and to develop advice for the Australian Research Council on a systematic and enhanced research effort in those areas.

- a common national computerised set of databases and a clearinghouse on all relevant language and literacy issues; eg research in progress; materials; professionals; courses.

- two commercially-orientated Business Language Units, aiming to administer programs of direct support to teachers and students (eg scholarships, tests, publications) as devolved from Departments of Education as well as commercial projects to generate revenue supplementing federal and State grants.

- two professional development centres for teachers of languages other than English; of ESL and literacy.

- an ongoing relationship with the Style Council of the Dictionary Research Centre.

- formal collaboration with the independently supported National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.

- the beginnings of a coordination and quality assurance activity for Australian English as a Foreign Language program in the Asian region

- A plain English document design and research unit.

- An office in Western Australia involving four universities.

- Information and Resources Centres in Tasmania and in the Northern Territory.

3.3 The main or distinctive features of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia are its decentralised but coordinated operations and the wide discipline focus of its work. These features respond to characteristics of Australian policy and the pragmatic constraints of having a relatively small population dispersed over vast areas of distance. We are attempting to generate "economies of scale" by building on expertise existing in universities at present and inviting these to join a formally networked structure that encompasses all areas of language and literacy. The role of the directorate is to make the system run but also to extract and advocate the policy implications of research to government and to various groups of practitioners. Our professional development centres and the open way we

establish future work programs aim to keep us attuned to the priorities and perceived needs of practitioners.

3.4 Initially established to meet the goals and principles of the National Policy on Languages the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia charter was modified to accommodate the revisions of the 1991 Australian Language and Literacy Policy; which is a continuation of the base 1987 policy.

3.5 The components of the work agenda of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia are:

1. English literacy (for both adults and children).
2. English as a second language (for children)
3. English usage and style (Australian English, Aboriginal English, plain English, legal English, media English)
4. Languages other than English (priority Asian Languages; Community language maintenance and bilingual education).
5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
6. Translating and Interpreting Services (Testing, Training Policy and Research).

3.6 The four goals which the Australian Language and Literacy Policy, as accepted by the federal cabinet, has enunciated and are the federal mandate to the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia are as follows:

1. "all Australian residents should develop and maintain a level of spoken and written English which is appropriate for a range of contexts, with the support of education and training programs addressing their diverse learning needs

2. the learning of languages other than English must be substantially expanded and improved to enhance educational outcomes and communication within both the Australian and the international community

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages should be maintained and developed where they are still transmitted. Other languages should be assisted in an appropriate way, for example, through recording

4. Language Services provided through interpreting and translating, print and electronic media and libraries should be expanded and improved"

3.7 The National Policy on Languages committed the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia to an even more inclusive agenda addressing the language ecology of Australia in general, policy review, public advocacy, language maintenance/bilingual education and areas encompassed in the complex interplay of social identity and communication in multilingual environments. This agenda remains alive via the direct research funding to the Institute.

3.8 The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia was originally conceived as an autonomous agent able to impact on language policy making by providing directly relevant research evidence. This notion derives primarily from the submission made by language professional associations to the Senate inquiry into the desirability of developing a national languages policy (Plan Lang Pol 1983). Michael Halliday, then head of linguistics at the University of Sydney, prepared the chapter that discussed the creation of a national languages institute. He argued that Australia needed a body that would "marshall explicit linguistic knowledge and apply this to social and educational problems" (Plan Lang Pol 1983). This is the core goal of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia.

3.9 I now describe some of the areas of work of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia before commenting on some of the inherent tensions, and the positive potential, of associating policy and research in language.

3.10 The following brief check-list is of a fraction of current or just completed research activity which is directly connected with a practical issue of language and language-in-education policy:

1. Descriptive and analytical studies of how English functions as a lingua franca in multi-lingual work settings. The linguistics and pragmatics of cross-cultural dimensions of this longitudinal research is not only intrinsically valuable but has significant training, awareness-raising and communication effectiveness benefits in workplaces.

2. A national training strategy for interpreters and translators so that cross lingual competency equivalence's can be established. This incorporates the breadth of current Interpreting and Translating needs: community languages; Aboriginal languages and the various communication systems of deaf Australians. Research will also address the commercial/legal needs of Interpreting and Translating to service Australia's burgeoning economic relationships with Asian countries. A literary translation counterpart is being considered.

3. A review of workplace oriented competency standards from a critical literacy perspective. Competency based training aggregates linguistic functions and content knowledge in ways that appeal to policy makers concerned with the labour market but may have a deleterious impact on the effectiveness of workplace language and literacy programs.

4. Long-term evaluative studies of bilingual education and immersion methodologies addressing the range of socio-linguistic variables and environmental factors that correlate with successful program implementation and student learning and which may be universal or language specific.

5. Continuing analyses combining census data and occasional surveys of inter-generational language maintenance patterns and the possible impact of policy on these.

6. Research into patterns of, and advice to parents on, family bilingualism.

7. A range of tests and other proficiency attainment measures on signed English and Australian Sign Language.

8. Occupation specific tests in Italian, French, Indonesian, Korean, German, Japanese and Chinese.

9. Research on test validation, rater and task characteristics in performance assessment.

10. Research into aspects of pedagogy appropriate for adapting character-based languages to distance education modes.

11. Analysis of cultural patterns in management training and workplace procedures across several Asian countries and within trans-national firms located in Australia.

12. An examination of the English for Specific Purposes training of major financial institutions in South-East Asia.

13. Research into the pedagogical symmetries between adult literacy, ESL, basic education and other adult training specialisations.

14. The discourse pragmatics and the various genre associated with communication between government departments and Aboriginal park rangers in National Parks.

15. Empirical studies of the Second Language Acquisition stages and processes in several languages.

16. Evaluations of the effectiveness of computerised linguistic analysis instruments and protocols.

17. Analysis of selected corpora across a wide range of deaf speech and writing to determine patterns and characteristics of development.

18. Ongoing collection and analysis of samples of Australian speech and writing and also aspects and features of Aboriginal English.

19. A major discipline review of the place and teaching of languages in higher education institutions.

20. A major review of the training and employment of school teachers of languages other than English.

21. A review of the practices and outcomes of the training in languages other than English of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

22. The completion of profile studies examining linguistic, socio-linguistic and education issues in ten of the fourteen priority languages of current government policy or languages teaching

23. Bandscales describing the ESL growth of children that can be mapped, appropriate reporting formats, assessment exemplars and corroborating psycholinguistic research on acquisition stages and processes.

24. Coordination of and evaluations of national in-service education for languages teachers.

25. and finally, the organisation of biennial languages Expos in different Australian cities.

3.11 This highly selected list, like all the work of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, features a dual character. On the one hand academic criteria prevail in the design, conduct and often in the initiation of the projects based on already enunciated policy. On the other hand the interests of communities and practitioners, not to mention government, are involved at several levels.

3.12 The scope of the work attempts to incorporate all areas of applied linguistics in Australia. A further goal is to produce a genuinely nationally applicable strategic research agenda (NLLIA 1993)

3.13 The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia research plan attempts to be cooperative in approach at both the individual researcher level and the level of institutions. More problematically; cooperative research processes are attempting to incorporate and reconcile the divergent priorities and professional cultures of the "disinterested researcher" and the "bureaucrat-politician"; the priorities of knowledge and action.

The next section addresses some of these tensions.

4.0 Research and Policy: An uneven fit.

4.1 The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia represents the interpretation by public authorities in Australia that research which is designed in consultation with practitioners and disseminated directly to them (practitioners here includes the bureaucrat-politician category of end user) is essential to the achievement of the ambitions goals on language that the nation has set itself.

4.2 But it is also partly in redress of Australia's long history of neglect of language questions and reflects the major role that language professionals, acting as an organised group, have themselves played in policy development. Research has been privileged because the discourse of some of the advocates necessarily includes it; but in reality is only one of several urgent areas that need redressing.

4.3 The processes of transforming ideas, policy and their ideological sub-stratum into institutional form is a complex and subtle one; a distilling into organisational form

of a series of idealisations and values. These idealisations and values are the ones that have been pervasive in the rhetorical accompaniment of the pressure, from the bottom up, that produced our national languages policy. They include the unity of all areas of specialisation in applied linguistics (therefore an organisation that allocates specific areas of focus to particular parts but which in its overall scheme represents a diversity of linguistic traditions); equality of treatment of all languages (therefore although languages of higher candidature in education receive proportionately more support all languages are included in some way; the values of pluralism in a sort of interactionist multi-ethnic nation within a unitary non-culturally specific state apparatus (this flows through into the new construct of nation that is pervasive in Australia today as a sort of poly-generic Asian nation or a Europeanised state with multiple ethnicities but actively participating as an Asian nation); the indigenisation of English (it is relevant but beyond the scope of this paper that the broader pluralistic policies and new national identification have also yielded an assertiveness about the Australian varieties of English and the declaration, now several years ago, of standard Australian English as our national language) and finally, the correlation between the social and occupational positions of minority language speakers and their cultural and linguistic affiliations. These are the key values or ideals that underlie our work.

4.4 The transformation into practical realisation of these and other "mental facts" is never likely to be easy or uncontested, and in some cases not even possible. Nevertheless these are crucial to understanding the culture of any organisation.

4.5 Language policy-making necessarily involves the values and the interests of all protagonists. Unless policy draws on these it risks descending into a sort of technocratic exercise, the manipulation of protocols for implementation. Such "technicism" is already evident in some language planning theory (see Luke, McHoul and Mey, 1990) as it is more widely in those areas of the human sciences that engage with policy (Hawkesworth 1988)

4.6 A tension underlies these encounters and it becomes especially acute when the policy issues are as complex and contested as language policy making in Australia has become today. Such policy involves the reconciliation of the claims and demands of speakers of more than 180 indigenous languages, many more if we include those who would reconstruct dead languages; the demands of speakers of more than 100 immigration-derived community languages and the imperatives of economy, the loud voice of Homo Economicus, which today in Australia has made government an uneasy ally of the community in construing languages as a resource. Our government; (indeed it is the view of virtually the entire political class, government and opposition, attributes to the learning of geo-politically and economically significant Asian languages the purposes of facilitating our integration into the Asian economic zone and, importantly, of helping to reconstruct our national self-image.

4.7 This tension has to do with the technical-political dichotomy. To have status planning that goes beyond expedient placatory politics requires empirical processes of data collection and analysis that can link desired national/educational goals with the language status changes that are advocated. To have corpus planning which is

successful requires language users to adopt the linguists' recommended norms. The more political of these two language processes requires technical content for its success; the more technical is aridly unsuccessful without persuasion and propagation

4.8 Positivist social science orientations have led some theoreticians of language to overrate the impact of research on policy. Reviews of the impact of research on policy are instructive however. Rein (1976:103) argues that "new information is assimilated into a paradigm that is remarkably persistent and resistant to change". Several obstacles present strong inhibitory influences on the impact that research can be expected to have on policy development. Among these are the great complexity of "social events" which are addressed by policy oriented research and especially of the consequent problems for prediction expected of research. It is also necessary, it seems, that a widely shared, if not universal, "viewpoint of interpretation" (Rein's term) is required to make knowledge useful in a collective way. Policy choices invariably require normative judgement; a principled relationship between facts and values that is not easy to find except in restricted environments.

4.9 Technical analysis, or systematic inquiry, or science even, assumes a different order of importance in policy contexts from its role in academic ones, since the criterion for decision making will invariably draw on a wider field of considerations than the findings of research.

4.10 Jayasuriya (1986:6) states that: "The predisposition, values and attitudes of both scientists and policy makers may obstruct and impede the proper utilisation of scientific knowledge by government and policy makers." He goes on to describe this as a clash of cultures: "the world of politics and administration and the world of science and scholarly inquiry."

4.11 So what are the nature and source of such differences? For Higgins (1980:22) the technical and the political functions of research are frequently in irreconcilable conflict. He traces this as follows: "The technical function requires that goals be identified precisely, in advance of action, but the political function is better served if goals are left implicit or vague. Researchers were unable to give policy makers clear-cut results and recommendations because of ambiguous and sometimes contradictory political requirements from the outset. Equally, politicians and policy-makers were often unwilling to specify distinct objectives, partly because of their uncertainties about ultimate goals, but also because of the advantages to them of retaining a degree of ambiguity."

4.12 Language policy making, and the next logical stage, planning; carry applied linguists and linguists most forcefully into policy research and into the tensions inherent in the technical-political dilemma it nurtures. The cultural and economic and social interests of the protagonists are brought most sharply into relief in the process of reconciling the interaction that is policy making. Annamalai offers a role from India for language planners and the agencies which have jurisdiction in this field when he comments: "Although public action forms a cline form memorandum

to revolt and its influence on policy is related to its force,... language policy is a process of reconciliation between planners and the public" he says.

4.13 The development and ultimate attainment of explicit and pluralistic language policy at the national level in Australia has involved the full participation of research and researchers. Applied linguists and linguists supplied an intellectual legitimation to demands made by community groups on reluctant power holders who wanted always to characterise these demands as nakedly self-serving or self-interested. The discourse of language policy making has been successfully transformed from one considered inappropriate for Australia to one connoting modernity, economic value, and the utilisation of resources in the nation's interest. These characterisations helped to transform negative stereotypes not just of the specific manifestation of language policy then proposed in Australia but of the activity itself. These have been distilled into the organisational form of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia and constitute much of the agenda of it's work.

4.14 I shall now address some of the aspects of contemporary language controversies and indicate how these impact on the Institute.

5.0 SOME CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND DISPUTES IN POLICY

5.1 Our national policies are agreed principles for action, not mandated on States or schools, but, in very large measure, agreed and co-operatively taken forward.

5.2 Past views of the activity of language policy making were uniformly negative. Along with other Anglophone nations, Australian political elites tended to hold one or other of the following images of language planning: Firstly that it was the corollary of a nationalist-impelled seeking for internal unity in post-colonial settings where a despised coloniser's language was being replaced by a cultivated or neutral indigenous language; secondly that it was seen as a sort of culturalist activity of "continental " Europeans to quarantine a culturally "prestigious" language from foreign loan words; and thirdly the commercially motivated activity of economically fast-growing non-English speaking nations seeking to diversify their economies by accessing technical literature and specialised knowledge, usually in English.

5.3 These days, however, Australian politicians actually compete with each other to have the best language policy position. Although the content of the language policy position advocated by conservative (Liberal) or Labour politicians varies according to which constituency is perceived to be most worth cultivating on several key principles there is an unprecedented consensus between them.

(i) that standard Australian English will be the source for the norms of correctness that education and the public media will propagate.

(ii) that the rate of extinction of Aboriginal languages (one per year)

must be redressed and that the focus ought to be on those languages still spoken by children. (I must interpellate here that we are still far from serious yet about the urgency of the need or the resources required to address it.)

(iii) that minority groups ought to be encouraged to retain their languages as they acquire English and that public support of this effort is warranted.

(v) that the overwhelming priority for second and foreign language learning ought to be for several key Asian languages considered of strategic, geo-political and economic priority; in descenting order Indonesian, Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Korean and Vietnamese.

5.3 Policy positions - official positions - are however much more pluralistic than the above since they also support publicly funded Interpreting and Translating services and multilingual media.

5.4 The timescale and the expectation of the politician is a remarkable thing. The priorities of the public which defines itself and its boundary markers in linguistic terms ie ethno-linguistic minorities often diverge markedly from the political priorities. The fault lines of current debate and contestation on language issues are many; I shall speak only of three.

1. A conflict and debate between the priorities that that emerge from the multicultural ethos and definition of our society and those that emerge from the economically motivated regionalism preferred by government and business. One favours solutions of pluralism and diversity the other is the resounding voice of HOMO ECONOMICUS. The former favours choices in schools of first language maintenance as the secure base for the acquisition of English; the other favours concerted acquisition planning of identified languages taught as foreign languages

2. A second tension that has emerged in recent years is a labour market rhetoric about literacy which has become an all-embracing discourse about competency standards. This, in the hands of policy makers, subsumes adult ESL and basic education and is counterposed to positions on targeted, specific-purpose programs and ESL as priority.

3 There are also cleavages around the extent to which private responsibility, rather than public, is the generator of better rates of language retention intergenerationally and, therefore, of a more vibrant language ecology.

5.5 Language issues have been on the agenda of public debate for many years. Individual and group bilingualism are increasingly identifers attached to a new national consciousness. This holds that we are a permanently and not a transiently linguistically diverse people and that the nation-concept must draw from its Asian geographical context as it does from its European historical founding. The public culture, not the private cultures, are the focus point of contestation. The dispute is

about the relative balances of legacy as against the imperatives of geography and economy. Applied linguistic research, everything from the semantics of nation, social identity and the linguistically mediated social and occupational opportunities and mobility of the population must be on our agenda of work. But these all carry the challenge of engagement with policy, in volatile and sometimes expedient times, to actively influence as much as to describe and analyse.

5.6 All organisations seek some autonomy of operation; and the dilemma of being appropriated by public authorities to the ends of legitimating their fixed positions on language matters is a common one for academic researchers. The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia has established arrangements that allow the bulk of its research to be undirected and self-generated. Were this not the case I suspect we would risk being drawn inexorably into the purposes and new constructs that government desires to impose on the complex multilingual scene we attempt to service. As long as the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia operates within a set of overarching policy principles as established in our national languages policy the technical dimension of policy research can engage the political in a mutually beneficial way. The decentralised distributed nature of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia may serve to protect the research interests by enveloping these in academic contexts; whilst the policy engagement is done by its commonly owned directorate which is separated, institutionally, from academe. It is also of great benefit that the ownership structure is so diverse, representing most States and Territories and many non-government interests. Inevitable problems of management derive from this but at least the mandate can be secured from the excessive influence of a single interest.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Despite these tensions and the pervasive issue of drawing public funds but expecting to do undirected research, significant progress towards positive encouragement of pluralism and language rights has been made.

6.6 Demographic linguistic diversity has bequeathed Australia a complex agenda of status planning; the number and diversity of indigenous languages and the huge task of seeking educational improvement for indigenous Australians has bequeathed us a great task of corpus planning; and the unprecedented nature of an Anglophone nation adapting culturally, economically and in national identification to its geographic proximates in Asia, has issued us an Acquisition planning job of big proportions.

6.7 The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia has been designed to be comprehensive of diverse language interests, to incorporate different linguistic research traditions and methodological approaches. Romaine (1990) in her edited book, Language in Australia, has commented that Australia is the first of the Anglophone nations to develop an explicit languages policy

6.8 If this is true it has served more to elevate language problems and issues for a more deliberate and sophisticated treatment than to solve problems.

6.9 The worst effect of the tendency to technify language planning would be, I feel, to reduce this most complex of activities to a set of sterilised and formulaic procedures for tracking the implementation of policy. This seems to me to remove from policy an essential ingredient; the socially situated resolution of contested positions. This exists primarily because of the socially differentiated outcomes that result from one or other choice.

6.10 The conflictual aspects of policy reflect the unequal starting points of participants (e.g. minorities seeking to advance their perceived interests) and the correlations both symbolic and practical, with social and occupational position. In such a context applied linguistic research performs a vital if, at times, ambiguous role.

6.11 This is some of the intellectual and socio-cultural and political context in which the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia is being progressively established.

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